

LAST week's news of Rothmans sponsoring the Isthmian League next season, with £16,000 being given away in prize money, has been warmly welcomed by Wycombe Wanderers officials. But, they couldn't help thinking what would have happened, had the offer been made a couple of seasons ago (writes Stuart Earp).

The scheme was devised by Jimmy Hill and Doug Insole in conjunction with Barry East, the Isthmian League chairman. Between them they came up with a scheme that centres around attacking and clean football, with improvement among officials.

Basically, the principles are these: Three points for a win and one for a draw. A £40 bonus to any club who wins by three clear goals. £1,000, £500, and £300 for first, second and third places in the league. There is also a cash award of £300 for the top goalscorers.

Those are the cash incentives. But there are also penalties for bookings and dismissals. Clubs lose four points for a sending off and one for a booking. If a club

loses eight points in a season, they do not qualify for the Sportsmanship Pool.

This pool will be shared out between clubs who have not accumulated over eight penalty points and they will receive a pro-rata slice of the cash.

Had Rothmans sponsored the League in the 1971/72 season, Wycombe would have netted about £3,000. They would have received a cool £1,000 for winning the league and a further £640 would have come from winning by three clear goals on no less than 16 occasions.

BOOM time for amateur football? The Isthmian League, who have followed the example of the Athenian League by admitting permit players this season, are to be heavily sponsored by Rothmans, writes Fred Harris. The matter was discussed at last Friday's council meeting, but the league are reluctant to release details of the plans until Thursday, July 19.

One of the men behind the scenes, I understand, is Jimmy Hill, the former Fulham player and TV sports personality.

There could be incentives for cleaner football and more goals, with a bonus for the club with the individual leading scorer.

The leagues, preparing for

During that season, only one Wanderer was booked — Rob Williams. This means that the Blues would have lost a mere one point as a penalty and would therefore have qualified for a large chunk of the Sportsmanship Pool.

Last year would have been less productive. For beating Dulwich Hamlet, Hitchin, Oxford City and Bishop's Stortford by three clear goals they would have got £160 but with Keith Searle sent off and several others booked, they would have amassed 11 penalty points. This

the 1974-75 season when all footballers will be known as players, have agreed that clubs be allowed to sign two permit players each. They will be ex-professional or reinstated amateurs.

Only a few years ago the top brass of both leagues would have quaked in their shoes at such a suggestion.

The Athenian League took their bold decision at their annual meeting last month when it was decided to delete the word amateur from the constitution of the league.

It was then unanimously voted that each club be allowed to sign two permit players in the coming season. These will be eligible for league and FA Cup matches but not Amateur or county cup ties.

Said league councillor Ted Corby, assistant secretary of Middlesex County FA and vice-chairman of Edgware FC: "This is a move in the right direction, and an obvious one. The league has merely anticipated by one season the

would have meant they could not have been in line for a share of the Pool.

Wanderers' treasurer, Roger Lee, welcomed the plan. He felt it was both professional and comprehensive.

Chairman Jack Smethurst was equally enthusiastic. "It's a marvellous plan," he said. "The Isthmian League has been accused of being stagnant in the past but with the Isthmians combining with the Athenian League and now this sponsorship, we should become the next best after the Football League."

changes that will take place."

The Isthmians threw out a suggestion that clubs be allowed to sign four permit players but compromised by allowing clubs to sign two each if they wanted to.

"I don't think that it will affect us this season," said Hendon secretary Harry Cartwright. "But obviously the matter will have to be thrashed out by our committee and manager Jimmy Quail."

Edgware, however, plan to take advantage of the innovation.

"I already have two players in mind," said manager Jim Redding. "But I do not intend to reveal their names until I have signed them on forms."

It will be an early start to the season for Hendon. As champions they will meet the Rest of the League at Claremont Road on Saturday, August 11. To legalise the position, the Isthmians have officially brought the season forward one week. Otherwise proceeds from the match would have gone to county charities. And Hendon could do with the money!

Besides a friendly at Barnet on Tuesday, July 31 (7.30 p.m.), Hendon entertain Harlow Town on Saturday, August 4, and play hosts to a strong Watford XI on Tuesday, August 14.

It is also rumoured that former manager John Evans, who took over the South American side Santa Fe last season is back in England. The club's annual meeting is on Thursday, July 26 (8 p.m.).

"It will no longer be possible to kick your way to the top." These were the words of the man responsible for the proposals of sponsorship, Jimmy Hill.

Mr. Hill, speaking at a press conference in the Imperial Hotel, London, held to announce the

proposals to the press, added: "There is no doubt that the trends that have taken place in the pattern of the game on the fields are not encouraging spectators. There are less goals; there is less attacking football; players are showing less sports-

manship, more gamesmanship and less respect for the referee."

"I hope that the proposals will create better harmony between the players and the referee. Neither appreciates that they are on the field because they both enjoy what they are doing."

Chairman of the Isthmian League, Mr. Barry East commented: "The league has been worried for some time about the waning appeal of soccer for spectators. We therefore instigated this scheme. The proposals place proper emphasis on winning, but also emphasise attacking football, and, most important, sportsmanship."

"We recognise the vital role of referees in any scheme aimed at improving behaviour on the field. The League administration will play its full part in the scheme of things by seeing to it, that any persistent offenders will not be allowed to play in the competition — their registration will be withdrawn."

"We are hopeful that the new format may begin to eliminate the 'professional' foul and the ultra-defensive methods which are now so prevalent. The kickers will be thrown out of football, and the Clubs themselves will have to accept the responsibility of making or losing money."

Last year the first three clubs in the league, Hendon, Walton and Hertham, and Leatherhead would not have qualified for the incentives for finishing in the first three positions, because of their record of sendings off and cautions.

The clubs are backing league officials in this venture. Said Mr. East: "We did not encounter any opposition to this scheme. The clubs and players welcome this. They are looking forward to the season and making the scheme work."

● Rothmans are also sponsoring the Hellenic League this coming season but on a smaller scale than the Isthmian League.